America the Beautiful, or the Exclusive? The Other in US Nature Conservation

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The 30 by 30 Campaign to protect 30 per cent of the planet's lands and oceans by 2030 has seen many people rally behind its catchy slogan. However, it has also sparked outcry, particularly amongst human rights activists and Indigenous peoples. While the campaign has been labelled "the big green lie" or "the new green colonial rule" by its opponents (Survival International, 2021), others – including representatives of First Nations – have supported governments in going forward with this conservation program, seeing it as an opportunity to strengthen Indigenous peoples' position and rights (see Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful (AtB), 2021, 5). This controversy sparks the question: Is 30 by 30 going to strengthen Indigenous peoples' voices in nature conservation, or is it going to marginalise them?

In May 2021, the US government released a preliminary report called "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful". It outlines recommendations and core principles to achieve a national conservation effort in line with the international 30 by 30 Campaign. The report is not a detailed blueprint but focuses on rethinking the government's approach to nature conservation for the coming decade. Because of this and its official status, it serves as a meaningful case study that can address the question of whether future conservation efforts will be inclusive towards Indigenous peoples in the United States. Analysing the US government's 30 by 30 plan is especially important, given that the government sees itself as a long-standing "global innovator" (Ibid, 16) in nature conservation – despite having a problematic history of displacing and marginalising Indigenous peoples in the process (see Treuer, 2021).

In this paper, I conduct a post-structural discourse analysis. Analysing how Indigenous peoples are discursively constructed in the AtB report can help answer the question of how inclusive future US-American nature conservation is going to be with respect to Indigenous peoples. First, I discuss the literature on and history of Othering Indigenous peoples and outline the methodology of my analysis. I then analyse the report at hand. I find that its discursive representations marginalise other Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing. I then counter the discourses of the report by presenting alternatives to them and uncovering their political character. Finally, I conclude that the discursive representations of the report not only silence other discourses and circumscribe Indigenous peoples' agency, but they also silence entire Indigenous worldviews. These worldviews, however, allow us to re-envision human relationships to the nonhuman world.

The Other: from "Wild Beasts and Wild Men" to the "Noble Savage"

First Nations and Indigenous people of the Global South have been marginalised for centuries in accounts of the Global North. Processes of Othering have been central in this and go back to colonial-era stories of racial and cultural inferiority, from the racist representation of the African "dark continent" and its "atavistic population" (Maya, 2020, 42) to British settlers' account of the American "desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" (Gosh, 2021, 64). Indigenous peoples were differentiated from settlers by being termed "savage" as opposed to *civilised* (Hansen, 2006, 39). The settler was also characterised as *modern*, *mature* and *rational*, differentiated from the *traditional*, *childish* and *irrational* colonised Other. Importantly, for this essay, the colonised Other was also understood to be close to or even one with *nature* – nature being constructed as a *wild*, *untamed*, *barren* and even *evil* place (see Maya, 2020; Cronon, 1995).

These problematic and deeply colonial depictions reach into today's discourses about the so-called 'developing world' with its population being depicted as *primitive*, *irrational* and *simple*, creating unequal power relations between the Global South and the Global North. These discourses feed not only into racist stereotypes but often serve as a premise for particular intervention by Western institutions such as the World Bank or governments of the Global North (see Hutchinson, 2014; Hansen, 2006; Ferguson, 1990; Mitchell, 2002). Very similar representations continue to be produced of First Nations in North America. Ledwell (2014), for example, finds a significant proportion of the Canadian media constructed native protesters partaking in the Idle No More movement as inherently *violent* and *uncontrollable*. In a Western Canadian hospital, Browne (2007) argues that Othering First Nations women – who were attributed with characteristics such as *passivity* and *dependency* – have seen them receive inferior treatment to Euro-Canadians.

For this paper, it is to note that, post-enlightenment, another gaze emerged in opposition to the above-articulated view, which hailed 'modernisation', 'development' and 'progress' and depicted theOther Indigenous people in need of being 'developed' and 'civilised'. A romantic view of nature emerged with the same dualisms inherent to it, the difference being that the "*positive* discourse of modernisation-as-progress" had been turned into a "*negative* discourse of modernisation-as-disruption" (Braun, 2002, 92). This discursive frame flipped the enlightenment view: The Other*,* Maya (2020, 43) argues*,* ceased to be seen as a 'primitive savage' that needed to be saved and instead became a romanticised 'noble savage' living in harmony with nature – a golden age of pre-industrial wilderness that had been lost in industrialised parts of the world. In the 1970s to 1990s, this romantic colonial gaze blended with socialist, feminist and, for this paper, most importantly, environmentalist movements (Maya, 2020, 43).

Today, Vrasti (2012, 122) argues both discourses are the foundation of the self-construction of the West, "which prides itself on having overcome the irrationality and despotism of primitive cultures, while also mourning the lost spiritual richness and natural harmony of earlier civilisations."

Indigenous peoples continue to be marginalised and othered in conservation projects and ecopolitics. Bruce Braun's (2002) account of postcolonial British Columbia forest politics shows how First Nations participate in ecopolitics, but only on very circumscribed terms, precisely within a romantic discourse of indigeneity and nature: Environmentalists concerned with the preservation of Clayoquot Sound discursively located the culture of the Nuu-chah-nulth*within nature*. Nature was understood as a primaeval entity, unspoiled from modern human intervention. By locating First Nations "at home in the wild" (Ibid, 88), the environmentalists equated the preservation of the nature of the sound with the preservation of indigeneity and vice versa. The Nuu-chah-nulth became the *Other* at home in the past, a people who were in danger of being lost. This had political consequences: in a legal struggle over the rights to Meares Island in Clayoquot Sound, the Nuu-chah-nulth had to prove that their territorial practices of today were the same and continuous as those before the arrival of Europeans. Their indigeneity, thus, was understood in specific terms: as tied to the past, to a particular, natural place and as continuous, "the assumption being that discontinuity was evidence of extinguishment" (Ibid, 99).

The Nuu-chah-nulth and other Indigenous groups participated in this discourse, for example, by commissioning studies that were accepted as proof of their 'continuous indigeneity' in front of Canadian tribunals (see Ibid). This is an example of subjectification, the "process through which individuals come to understand themselves, their position and possibilities for action in the world" (Vrasti, 2012, 128). It also links to Spivak's (1988) essay*Can the Subaltern Speak?* that people with low social status, particularly (post)colonial subjects, do not have agency and cannot speak and/or be heard within the hegemonic discourses of the dominant (Western) group. She calls this "epistemic violence" – violence through discourse (Riach, 2017, 27). Though the Nuu-chah-nulth certainly spoke and might have been heard at the tribunal, the hegemonic discursive representations of themselves cast them into a position with little agency: they had to prove that their indigeneity, their use of the forest on Meares Island, had been 'continuous' (Braun, 2002, 99).

Given this vast history of marginalising and Othering Indigenous peoples, this paper investigates whether the re-envisioned US-American nature conservation framework is going to be more inclusive towards First Nations. Discourse analysis can help analyse to what extent Indigenous peoples might be othered and marginalised in the AtB

report.

Discourse: Producing Knowledge and Worlds

Post-structural discourse analysis exposes meaning-making practices – such as language, symbols and imagery – that, as Foucault (2002, 54) put it, "systematically form the objects of which they speak". In other words, these practices "[do] not reveal essential truths" (Dunn and Neumann, 2016, 262) but produce collective conventions and codes that we regard as 'facts'; they fix particular representations that endow entities with particular meanings and identities.

Given that discursive practices, then, constitute the realm in which knowledge is produced, they are inherently political and enable the exercise of power – they carve out a particular reality which they claim to describe while they silence others (Sachs, 2009, 19). This is particularly powerful when discourses become re-articulated and establish authority and form political projects as well as social order – like they did during the colonisation of North America and other parts of the world, where, as mentioned above, First Nations were constructed as 'savages' and settlers as 'civilised' which legitimised European dominance and the colonial project.

By analysing these discourses, we can reveal "how we come to take a certain phenomenon or an entire social reality for granted, and what kind of effects it has to naturalise that reality rather than another" (Dunn and Neumann, 2016, 262). Importantly, prevalent discourses and the 'truths' they produce may confine the scope for action and social change because they "enable actors to 'know' […] and to act upon what they 'know'" (Ibid, 268). Analysing how First Nations are discursively represented in the report at hand will enable us to understand the terms on which First Nations are expected to participate in the national conservation project. By making these discursive representations visible, contesting and consequently de-naturalising them, we may be able to envision other forms of participation or alternatives to nature conservation altogether.

For this essay, Hansen's (2006) account of *Othering* – or the *Self* and the *Other* – is particularly important. She argues that constructing the identity of objects of knowledge is made possible via two processes: a "positive process of linking" and a "negative process of differentiation" (Ibid, 17). Drawing on the example of Indigenous peoples and settlers during colonisation again, Indigenous peoples were defined through a series of linkages: they were, among other things, constructed as *traditional*, *childish, savage* and *irrational*. These linkages were differentiated with the series of linkages defining the settlers who, in turn, constructed themselves as *modern*, *mature*, *civilised* and *rational.* This discursive juxtaposition of the colonised Other and the settler-Self created a clear hierarchy that served the colonial project (see Hansen, 2006, 39; Maya, 2020).

If discourse analysis is a method or an attempt to capture how language produces the world around us and if knowledge might be no more something of finding than of making (see Goodman, 1978), then it is also ontology that is at stake here – that is, philosophically understood, the study of what is and, if we do not presume a mind-world dualism, how we as human beings are making worlds. Discourse analysis is one method that can help us understand how different peoples construct different worldsif we are not living in an "independently existing reality" (Jackson, 2011, 30). This is an important note to make, even if this essay does not focus on comparing ontologies, because the following discourse analysis offers a glimpse into different worlds. Even more importantly, we can understand that the silencing of alternative ways of making meaning is putting entire worlds at stake.

Analysis: Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful – A Preliminary Report

The AtB report does not mention Indigenous peoples very often. When Indigenous peoples are mentioned, however, they are constructed as the Other, which is largely linked to the *local*, the *past*, *nature*, *non-agency* and *non-science*. These links are differentiated from those of the Self, which I will call the cosmopolitan Self in this paper, linked to the *global*, the *present*, *culture*, *agency* and *science*. Whereas in many discourses of development, the Self could be termed 'Western', the Self in this report represents a global, cosmopolitan Self of what is represented as the 'modern world' in the report – to which the US government belongs.

Although this paper does not analyse the discursive absences of Indigenous peoples in the report further, it is to note that these absences are "meaningful" (Schröter and Taylor, 2018, 6): they contribute to the hierarchy between the cosmopolitan Self – that is never absent – and Indigenous peoples that is created by the discursive representations of the report.

Science – Non-Science or Experts – Non-Experts

The report repeatedly emphasises the importance of "science in guiding good land and ocean management decisions" (AtB, 2021, 12) and that these "management decisions" should be informed by the "best available scientific information and accurate maps" (Ibid), and that science can "provide information about the places that are most rich in wildlife, that store the most carbon, or that are most rare or imperiled" (Ibid, 13). Science, here, is depoliticised and seen as a tool to reconcile divergent perspectives and concerns and as a guide in conservation (Ibid, 12).

On page fifteen of the report, the authors then differentiate science from "Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge" (Ibid, 15). Listing a lot of scientific achievements, the authors state that scientists have gained a remarkable understanding of "complicated natural systems" and how to conserve them and that "[c]onservation efforts are more successful and effective when rooted in the best available science and informed by the recommendations of top scientists and subject matter experts" (Ibid). On the other hand, it is said that Indigenous knowledge can "complement and integrate these efforts" (Ibid). Indigenous ways of knowing are consequently portrayed as *non-science*, while Western forms of knowing are constructed as something superior and *objective* to Indigenous ways of knowing.

Ultimately, then, the Selfis not only linked to *science* – which is constructed as a superior way of knowing – and to *expertise* and *objectivity* but also to *effectiveness* and *complexity* because "top scientists" apparently produce the best conservation outcomes (Ibid). Indigenous people seem not to be understood as 'subject matter experts'. Their ways of knowing are constructed as inferior and linked to *non-science*, *non-expertise*, *subjectivity*, *ineffectiveness* and perhaps *simplicity*. What is more, the ways of knowing of the Self are almost constructed as *progressive* or *modern* because scientists seem to be constantly *gaining* new knowledge; Indigenous ways of knowing, in comparison, seem *static*, *residual* or perhaps "*[t]raditional*" (Ibid, emphasis added). It is to note that "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" (TEK) (Ibid) is an established but highly debated term that is accused of being imbued with a Western gaze because it was coined within Western academia in an effort to create 'factual' "science concrete" out of Indigenous knowledge (Kim et al., 2017, 260). As such, TEK "increases the chances of misrepresenting and misinterpreting the knowledge of Aboriginal peoples" (Simpson in Kim et al., 2017, 260).

These discursive constructions are colonial discourses that produce a clear knowledge hierarchy and marginalise Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing.

Global Manager – Local Steward

Indigenous ways of knowing and expertise are further constructed as *local* and, again, *complementary,* and Indigenous peoples are represented as *one of many stakeholders*. In several parts of the report, Indigenous peoples appear in enumerations of many local, specific stewards of the environment, almost blending in with professions such as those of local businessmen and -women, ranchers, and farmers. On page fourteen, for example, the report calls to recognise "the oversized contributions that farmers, ranchers, forest owners, fishers, hunters, rural communities, and Tribal Nations already make in safeguarding wildlife and open spaces" (AtB, 2021, 14). This is an odd enumeration because it seems to neglect the foundational injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples. Besides, as we will later see, it also subsumes Indigenous people into an enumeration of stakeholders whose worldview is likely to be very different from Indigenous ones.

Similarly, on page seventeen, the creation of an "American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas" is recommended where already existing national databases can be "supplement[ed]" (Ibid, 17) with information from "States, Tribes, public stakeholders, and scientists" (Ibid) – because it is recognised that there is a lack of information on

"conservation strategies" and "tools" of "Tribal Nations, […] farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners" (Ibid). While this might appear appreciative and inclusive at first, Indigenous ways of knowing are further constructed as something supplementary, one of many local, perhaps specific, bodies of knowledge made up of "strategies" and "tools" that are assumed to fit into databases created by the Self (Ibid).

These discursive representations of the report seem to construct the Otheras a *local steward* and thecosmopolitan Selfas a *global manager* who brings different types of knowledge together and renders them *factual* or *scientific*. While Indigenous peoples are constructed to have inferior ways of knowing and being the stewards of their local environment, the ways of knowing of the Self are constructed superior and objective, making it the national or global manager of the natural world – but also of Indigenous peoples.

Agency – Non-Agency

Although the report states it has been written in consultation with Indigenous peoples (see Ibid, 13), they are repeatedly constructed as the *passive recipient* of the cosmopolitan Self's seemingly *benevolent* "support" and "help" (Ibid, 14) in several sections of the report (Ibid, 10, 11, 14, 19). They are, therefore, linked to *non-agency* while the Self is connected to *agency.*

From pages 13 to 16, for example, the report's authors recommend principles that should guide conservation policies in the next decade. One of those principles calls to "[h]onour Tribal [s]overeignty and [s]upport the [p]riorities of Tribal Nations" (Ibid, 14). In the paragraph below, it is stated that conservation and restoration "must involve regular, meaningful, and robust consultation with Tribal Nations" and that they must "honour Tribal sovereignty, treaty and subsistence rights, and freedom of religious practices" (Ibid). Besides, the US-American government "should seek to support and help advance the priorities of American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and indigenous leaders […]" (Ibid). While this might appear inclusive, Indigenous people are only spoken for, and only the Self is active and has agency: it honours, supports, helps, and consults, while Indigenous peoples are*reliant* on these *benevolent actions*.

Besides, as we have seen above, the Self facilitates and builds the channels for Indigenous peoples to provide input – through the American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas" (Ibid, 17), for example. It is consequently the Self that facilitates and circumscribes the agency and participation of Indigenous peoples. Likewise, on page 19, it is recommended that governmental funding and assistance programmes for environmental conservation and restoration should be adjusted and made more inclusive towards Indigenous peoples. It is argued that this is needed because Indigenous peoples are either "not written into legislation that authorises key Federal programs, or because they may not have capacity to navigate the bureaucracy to participate in the programs for which they are eligible" (Ibid, 19) – again, the Self has agency and can render Indigenous peoples eligible or ineligible to participate. Either way, the Other is constructed to *rely* on the Self.

Present – Past

In the introduction of the report, a short paragraph reminisces about Natives' life in North America before the arrival of the Europeans:

"Since before America's founding, the health and productivity of the continent's lands and waters supported an abundance of human life and activity. From the bounty of the Great Plains and vast coastal forests to the high deserts of the Southwest and beyond, Native peoples built some of the most enduring and advanced civilisations on Earth. Many hundreds of Indian Tribes lived sustainably on the lands for millennia."

(Ibid, 8)

This is a revealing quote for several reasons, one of them being its temporality. Indigenous peoples seem to be located in the *past*: they "built some of the most enduring and advanced civilisations on Earth" and "[m]any hundreds of Indian Tribes lived sustainably on the lands for millennia" (Ibid). Even though many hundreds of tribes still live in

the United States today, the text gives the impression that Indigenous peoples' way of life is constructed as a *relic* of old times that has been *static* for millennia. It is to note, of course, that the introduction's purpose seems to be to tell the United States history until the present day, and it is written in the past tense. However, Indigenous peoples do not feature in the next paragraphs about how US-American history unfolds. A "new nation" is being built with "fast-growing industries" supplying their products to the entire world (Ibid). The Self, although being described in the past tense, is *emerging*.

One exception brings Indigenous peoples back into the picture:

"Often, our nation's lands and waters have been venues of struggle and injustice. For well over a century, the U.S. Government waged war against Native peoples, taking their lands, killing their sacred wildlife, implementing brutal assimilation policies, and making and breaking promises."

(Ibid)

While it is most certainly important to recognise this violence, Indigenous peoples' way of life is only presented as one of the *past;* they also, again, do not have agency. The report consequently links Indigenous peoples to the *past,* potentially even constructing them as a people *in decline,* while the Self is linked to the *present*, a people *emerging*. This especially marginalises the presence of contemporary Indigenous peoples.

Culture/Modernity – Nature

The same paragraphs that locate Indigenous peoples in the past also link them to *nature* in a specific way. While it is said that Indigenous peoples "built some of the most enduring and advanced civilisations" which seems to counter the discourses of cultural inferiority, their civilisations appear to be linked to the "bounty of the Great Plains", "vast coastal forests" and "high deserts" (Ibid). Their "civilisations" seem to be *civilisations* or *cultures of nature*. While the Self, the emerging new nation which is described quite gloriously, is building industries and economies (see Ibid). This evokes a much more *industrial,* perhaps *modern,* idea of civilisation or at least gives the impression that the culture of nature is being transcended by the Self. Importantly, the Self, here, is constructed as *dynamic* and *progressive*.

If Indigenous peoples are linked to nature, and the Self is linked to culture, the discourse of Indigeneity or the Othering in the report takes place within a *nature-culture* discourse or dualism. Unlike Indigenous peoples who are linked to "vast coastal forests" and the "high deserts of the Southwest" (Ibid), the Self seems to be somehow more *separate* from nature: it is said that the "natural world offered peace, escape, and hope" during the coronavirus pandemic (Ibid, 22). "America the Beautiful", for the authors, is a place that people go to if they want to "unwind" and seek "strength, comfort and inspiration" – it is not a part of everyday life (Ibid, 8). The cognitive failure of excluding the coronavirus from nature underlines this as well. However, the authors of the report do recognise humans' general reliance on nature (see Ibid) and the "co-benefits" of "working lands" (Ibid, 16). Thus, the Self is not consistently constructed as entirely separate from nature.

What is striking, however, even in other parts of the report, is the way that nature is constructed as *balanced* and *static*, whereas culture is *dynamic*, *in flux* and *progressive,* as we have seen above. The authors repeatedly talk about the "balance of nature" (Ibid, 9) or "ecological balance" (Ibid, 15); they also praise the amount of "intact natural lands" (Ibid, 10) in the United States, although they warn many ecosystems "have already been lost" (Ibid, 9). Nature is consequently not only inherently *balanced* and *static* but something that is linked to a *primaeval* state and is currently being *lost*. Indigenous people, then, are not only linked to nature – at least significantly more so than the cosmopolitan Self – but both Indigenous peoples and nature are linked to very similar characteristics.

By being linked to a static, balanced, primaeval nature, Indigenous peoples are constructed not to be disrupting that equilibrium – this reinforces previous findings that they are constructed as *residual*, linked to the *past*, *static* and *non-modern*. This, too, is echoed in the quote that links their culture to nature: they have "lived sustainably on the lands for millennia" (Ibid, 8) – seemingly not disrupting the primaeval "wonders of nature" (Ibid, 6) as they are being

depicted by the authors of the report. Besides, it could be argued that, with both nature and Indigenous peoples being linked to each other as well as to the past and potentially to decline, Indigenous peoples could be understood to run the risk of becoming *lost,* too.

I conclude that the Self is linked to a *dynamic* and *progressive culture* or *modernity,* while the Other is linked to a *static*, *balanced* and *primaeval nature*. This is then how the Other and the Self are differentiated – one exists within nature, one (significantly more so) within culture.

These discursive representations also have an impact on how later statements in the report are perceived. For example, towards the end of the report, the authors call for improving the land into trust process for Native Americans because "Tribes have time and time again proven to be the most effective stewards of natural resources" (Ibid, 19). Given that the report has constructed indigenous peoples as *non-experts* andlinked them to *nature*, one wonders if they are assumed to be the best stewards of nature because it is assumed that Indigenous peoples are somehow *part of nature.*

We also see that the report switches back and forth between "denigrating and idealising the [O]ther" (Vrasti, 2012, 122) – by repeatedly praising and emphasising the cosmopolitan Self's *progress*, constructing it as having overcome the *culture of nature*, while, at the same time, producing a romanticising image of Indigenous peoples' *residual civilisation*s that are in *balance with the natural world*. Some paragraphs of the report, like the one that links Indigenous peoples to "the bounty of the Great Plains" and "the high deserts of the Southwest" (AtB, 2021, 8), certainly have a melancholic undertone, as if the authors of the report are "mourning the […] natural harmony of earlier civilisations" (Vrasti, 2012, 122). Here, Indigenous peoples are depicted as 'noble savages', while they are constructed as 'unprogressive' in other parts of the report, such as in the section on 'science' and Indigenous knowledge.

Letter from Tribal Leaders and Tribal Organization Leaders

In a section called 'Envisioning America the Beautiful', quotes of the visions and expectations of different stakeholders are listed. A letter from Tribal leaders and Tribal organisation leaders says:

"Tribal Nations are key to the success of the 30×30 policy initiative in the U.S. as they are intrinsically linked, presently and historically, to existing and prospective protected areas. Tribal Nations are the original stewards of these lands and waters and have been the most effective managers and protectors of biodiversity since time immemorial […]. The 30×30 policy serves as a vitally important opportunity to safeguard the environment, Tribal cultural values, strengthen the Nation-to-Nation relationship, and uphold Tribal sovereignty and self-determination".

(AtB, 2021, 5)

That they call themselves "original stewards" (Ibid) sets them apart from other stewards of the environment listed in the report, such as ranchers, fishers, and farmers, with which they appear in several enumerations. Additionally, not only are Tribal Nations being called "the most effective *managers*" (Ibid, emphasis added), but they also call themselves *protectors* of biodiversity. Thus, they construct themselves as active with more agency than the authors of the report and perhaps counter the construction of them as *local stewards relying on a manager*. Besides, their call to strengthen the Nation-to-Nation relationship calls for eye-level engagement and consequently opposes the power – and knowledge hierarchy between the Self and the Other that the report creates.

However, besides these more or less subtle differences, the letter of the Tribal leaders generally participates in the discourse of the report that links Tribal nations to nature – nature seems to need Indigenous peoples and vice versa. Tribal nations have been intrinsically linked to nature and protected it "since time immemorial" (Ibid). Stating they are linked "presently and historically" (Ibid) to landscapes and thus key to conservation, they clearly differentiate themselves from the cosmopolitan Self who is consequently not linked to landscapes or at least less so.

Interestingly, then, the only time we hear Indigenous voices in the report, their own subjectification seems to be

barely different, if at all, from the way the Other is constructed by the authors of the report. The Indigenous leaders generally participate in the knowledge that the authors of the report generate of them and in the world that is created by the discursive representations of the report. That their self-knowledge is aligned with the 'truths' that the report imposes on them circumscribes their agency further – like the discourse of indigeneity circumscribed the Nuu-chah-nulth's agency in Canadian ecopolitics (see Braun, 2002).

To summarise, Indigenous people are being linked to the *past*, the *local*, *non-science*, *non-agency* and *nature* and characteristics such as *passivity*, *simplicity*, *balance*, *non-modernity*, *dependence* and *ineffectiveness*. The result is that this report constructs them as somehow *primitive* peoples that are inferior to the Self. The cosmopolitan Self is linked to the *present*, the *global*, *science*, *culture* and *agency,* as well as to *objectivity*, *benevolence*, *progress* and *complexity*. However, we can de-naturalise these discursive representations.

Clashing Worlds: Western and Indigenous Ontologies

In this section, I seek to contest the discursive representations of the report, primarily by making their political character visible and the discourses, even worldviews, that they silence.

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), an ecologist and member of the Potawatomi Nation, argues in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* that Indigenous knowledge is not *non-science.* The Indigenous basket makers that feature in Kimmerer's book, for example, observe the results of their interactions with sweetgrass, evaluate their findings and create management guidelines from them – just because they do not record this information in databases or generate graphs from it, it is not non-science. In fact, Kimmerer offers insights into how Indigenous ways of knowing are *complex* and engage all the human ways of understanding – the mind, body, spirit and emotion. Cosmopolitan science, instead, privileges only the mind (and maybe the body), rigorously separating the observer from the observed (Ibid, 42). Thus, it, too, has its limits. Why asters and goldenrods look beautiful together, for example, is a question that cosmopolitan science cannot answer alone (Ibid, 46).

The question of science and non-science thus becomes a question of *clashing ontologies*. Cosmopolitan science "reduces a being to its working parts; it is a language of objects" (Ibid, 49) that "robs a person of selfhood and kinship" (Ibid, 55), whereas, in most Indigenous languages, all living beings, humans and nonhumans – water, fire and mountains included – are addressed the same way: with a "grammar of animacy" (Ibid, 58). This establishes what Kimmerer calls "a democracy of species, not a tyranny of one" (Ibid, 58). This is the foundation of Kimmerer's Indigenous relationship with the earth. Ecological restoration or conservation is inseparable from this spiritual and cultural domain, Kimmerer argues throughout her book. But while her Indigenous relationship with the earth is one of "respect, responsibility, and reciprocity […] and love" (Ibid, 336), the Western or cosmopolitan one is one of exploitation, rendering the earth's "gifts" into "commodities" (Ibid, 31). Although science is crucial for long-term, successful restoration and conservation efforts, humanity must restore its relationship of responsibility, respect, and reciprocity to earth, she writes (Ibid, 336).

What we are talking about, then, is the construction of different and contradicting worlds – in this case, that of the cosmopolitan Self and that of the Potawatomi and other Indigenous nations that the AtB report silences.

All this is not an Indigenous conservation 'strategy' or 'tool' that fits into 'scientific databases'. It is also not inherently *local* or *of the past* but a different behaviour towards and interaction with the world that is grounded in a different worldmaking process. Whereas state regulations on harvesting are grounded in scientific data, for example, the "Honourable Harvest" (Ibid, 183) by which many Indigenous Nations abide is grounded in ideas of accountability, responsibility and personhood of all living beings. "Killing a *who* demands something different than killing an *it*" (Ibid, 183), Kimmerer argues. This Indigenous worldview is a *complex* one, and as a worldview, it cannot simply fit into and complement the scientific databases and other channels of input created by the cosmopolitan Self. By constructing this worldview as a *residual*, *simplistic* and *non-scientific culture of nature* that can *complement* the world constructed by the cosmopolitan Self, the report silences Indigenous peoples' ontologies and leaves them no room to participate on their own terms.

What the report calls *objective* and "best available scientific information and accurate maps" (AtB, 2021, 12) is a discourse, too. Braun (2002), for instance, analyses computer-generated maps of Vancouver Island created by environmentalists. Their maps consist of colour-coded regions, each representing a type of ground cover such as "urban areas", "modified landscapes", and "ancient rainforest" (Ibid, 224). These lines were drawn to depict the forest as something that was disappearing – on satellite photographs, however, Vancouver Island was still covered in greenery. While these distinctions were grounded in scientific evidence, the map emphasised the differences that were thought to matter by the environmentalists: the expansion of "modified landscapes" at the expense of "ancient rainforest". It did not emphasise the expansion of "urban areas" at the expense of "modified landscapes" because it ascribed little value to their complex ecosystems (Ibid, 224). The map operated within a romantic discourse of nature, where nature was in equilibrium; once perturbed by human interference, it was spoiled. Thus, while maps may be accurate based on the distinctions they seek to make, they are not statements of truth or objectivity. Knowledge claims emphasise the things that matter to the knower.

Lastly, Indigenous cultures are not *cultures of nature* and do not exist in *balance* or *harmony* with nature. In her book *Islands of Abandonment*, Flyn (2021) describes how warfare between First Nations in North America created no-go buffer zones between their territories where wildlife regenerated. In the case of the Chippewa and the Sioux, the spillover effects of the buffer zones created so much wealth that the two nations signed peace treaties that allowed hunting to resume. Once the wildlife numbers crashed, their war over resources started again. The romanticising scenery that the report paints when it describes "the bounty of the Great Plains and […] the high deserts of the Southwest", where "[m]any hundreds of Indian Tribes lived sustainably on the lands for millennia" (AtB, 2021, 8), constructs a kind of natural harmony that did not exist as such. Nature has always been dynamic.

So, if Indigenous peoples are better at caring for the environment than other peoples like the report argues, this is certainly not because they are a *primitivist*, *residual* people that lives in *harmony* with nature, but perhaps because they have a worldview in which they have responsibilities towards and seek to live in reciprocity with the dynamic nonhuman world. All humans rely on the nonhuman world just the same, but the constructed worldview of the cosmopolitan Self paints a world in which just a few peoples*remain* linked to it – however, this is not a question of *past* and *present* or *stagnancy* and *progress* but *active*, *everyday worldmaking* of both the cosmopolitan Self and Indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that the discursive representations of the AtB report other and marginalise Indigenous peoples. By essentially constructing them as a *primitive*, *residual* people with *no expert knowledge* but as good *local* stewards of the environment who live *in harmony with nature*, the report is not only condescending towards Indigenous peoples – circumscribing the terms on which they can participate in the national conservation effort – but silences Indigenous worldviews altogether. Ultimately, despite its goals to re-envision nature conservation and to make it more inclusive, the America the Beautiful Campaign and, consequently, future nature conservation projects are very likely going to marginalise Indigenous peoples in the United States.

However, de-naturalising the discourses of the report and uncovering the worlds they silence offers the potential for actually re-envisioning nature conservation or, rather, our entire relationship with the nonhuman world.

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